

The Cover Story

IS YOUR COLLECTION READY FOR YOU TO DIE?

Part 1 – The Collectors Viewpoint by Robert Fisher

Several years ago, a friend of mine related a true horror story to me. Her father had been a collector of old, rare and unusual books for many years. When he died the book collection numbered into the hundreds but was not inventoried. His wife had no interest in them and just considered them to be dust collectors cluttering up her house. Since she had no interest in his hobby, he never told her about the value and uniqueness of his collection.

Shortly after the funeral, my friend visited her mother and found her in the process of burning her father's book collection; she didn't think that they were valuable because the books were so old and dirty. My friend was able to salvage a dozen or so volumes, but most of it was ashes.

Now, put yourself in the shoes of that other collector. Does your spouse or any other family member have any idea what is in your stamp collection? What the value of it is? What dealers that you trust to give fair value for it? Or will it wind up in the trash bin, thrift shop, church rummage sale, or given to the grandchildren to play with? (OOH! Look at all the pretty stickers!!)

Is your collection a jumbled up mess of shoe boxes, plastic bins full of loose stamps and covers, and plastic bags full of something that you picked up at an auction but can't remember when? Do YOU even know what you have, what is valuable and what is not? Does your stamp room look something like **Figure 1** (on the front cover of the newsletter)?

Kinda scary, isn't it? And if YOU think that it is scary, how would your family feel? They already are either grieving or celebrating your passing and have no idea what to do with your junk ... errr, I mean prized collection. I think that we are all guilty of this to some extent. It really IS quite overwhelming to look at that room (or rooms) full of "stuff" and try to figure out what to do and where to start. Hopefully, we can share some ideas that may be of some help.

Where to start? First I would suggest that you start organizing and labeling containers. Put what you can into albums. Label them. Once you have a moderately organized set of piles, start documenting them. Begin with the stuff that you know has some value, is scarce or is your favorite. Sit down with a notebook, computer spreadsheet, index cards or stamp inventory software and start logging your best and significant items [**Figure 2**]. If some of them don't have catalog numbers, make up your own. After all, that is what Scott and all of the others did. For unique items why not scan them and put a copy of the scan along with the written description. Of course, this would be overkill for the more mundane First Day Covers, like shown in **Figure 3**.

When describing something unique, like a cover from the pre-stamp era, describe it as thoroughly as you can. Be verbose and list everything about the item that you know or suspect. This is not a stamp exhibit where brevity is king. Where is the item from and where did it go? What was happening at those places at that time, that may have some bearing on the item? Why did you acquire this item? From whom? How much? Do you know anything about the postmark, the sender, the recipient, the country?



Figure 2



Figure 3

Once an item has been inventoried, place it and a copy of the inventory description in an album, binder, stockbook, or any safe place to protect it and keep it neat and orderly. After all, this is the heart of your collection. Maybe keep the inventory with your will and burial arrangements. What?! You haven't done that either?

Don't get discouraged at the scale of the effort. I think that once you get organized and actually started, you will find that it gets easier and that you are learning new things about your collection and you may find that you appreciate it more. The thing to keep in mind is that you are doing this for your loved ones and your family too. Even if your family can't understand some of the philatelic technical terms, the dealer to whom they will show this to, probably will, if he is worth his salt. Also, bear in mind that your family needs to know that you are doing this and will know where to look for it if you get run over by a mail truck. They need to know computer passwords as well.

As you proceed to categorize some of the piles, you will undoubtedly find that you have acquired duplicates of some

items. You may also find holes in the collection that you want to fill. Most of us tend to specialize in something that is near and dear to our hearts. As you organize, you may find other areas that interest you and rekindles that fire of exploring unknown territory.

Something that you might want to keep with your inventory is a list of dealers that you trust and the areas that the dealers specialize in. Another thing to consider is that you might select a person or stamp club (hint, hint) to act as an agent in the collection disposal process. But *please* let the individual or organization know of your intentions. You also might want to discuss your plans with some of the dealers that you trust and get their feelings on the subject. After all, they are the ones who sold the material to you and have some idea of how much they overcharged you for those bargains.

Finally, there are a few websites that may provide some guidance. I found three that were pretty helpful or just google "sell stamp collection".

- http://www.ehow.com/how_4674496_sell-stamp-collection.html
- http://www.americanstampdealer.com/SubMenu/Selling_a_Stamp_Collection.aspx
- <http://voices.yahoo.com/how-sell-stamp-collection-best-price-4984234.html>

[Editor's note: Part 2 of this article will appear in the September 2014 Newsletter.]